The Sources of Moral Agency

Essays in Moral Psychology and Freudian Theory

JOHN DEIGH

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Morality and personal relations

Is morality a system of rules to live by? Many philosopher think so and regard ethics as the discipline that formulates, systematizes, and justifies such rules. Yet this approach to ethics can make living a decent, upstanding life seem a matter of living according to formulae. The culprit is almost always an excessive rationalism, which takes morality to be an abstract system of principles whose truth no fully rational soul who gave them a complete and impartial hearing could deny.[1] On the most ambitious of these rationalist views, the relation of the system to the customary morality of this or that earthly society is understood to be like the relation of a Platonic form to each of its exemplifications in the world. Just as each exemplification resembles imperfectly the form, so the customary morality of each earthly society resembles imperfectly the system. And just as according to Plato's theory of education one arrives at knowledge of the forms by stages that begin with acquaintance with their exemplifications, so according to a well-respected rationalist theory of moral education one arrives at moral knowledge, knowledge of the abstract system of principles, by stages that begin with the inculcation of the mores of one's society.[2] The rationalist will tell us that those who attain such knowledge come to understand themselves as having realized fully their rational nature and achieved true freedom and that this final advance in self-knowledge gives a special meaning and value to their use of and adherence to the system's principles. But to one who has trouble seeing why such individuals are any more rational or free than a ruthless businessman who knows what he wants and has the brains and determination to get it, moral judgments and moral decisions, *as the rationalist characterizes them*, will seem like so many computational or legalistic exercises. What this approach obscures and distorts, when it runs to such abstraction, is morality's social function, its role in defining and regulating people's personal relations and their more distant social relations.

1. Recent works of ethical rationalism include Alan Donagan, *The Theory of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); and Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).
2. Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981, 1984), vols. I & II.

A different approach focuses on this social function. In any communal group of people, peaceable relations among them will not last for long if they do not share an understanding of what forbearances and positive services each owes the others. The customary morality of a society is to a large extent a shared understanding of this sort, and its function, then, is to foster and maintain peaceable, stable relations among the society's members. This idea, to be sure, is far from new. It can be attributed to Protagoras for instance, if Plato, in the dialogue he named for Protagoras, accurately represented his views.[3] And among modern philosophers, Hume is widely recognized as its most powerful exponent.[4]

Now the customary morality of any society, if it is to foster and maintain peaceable, stable relations among the society's members, must include certain prohibitions and requirements. It must include prohibitions on the use of violence, requirements of honesty and respect for others' property, and prohibitions and requirements that regulate sexual conduct. This much is plain from the common conditions of human life: that men are mortal; that they are prone to hostile and belligerent action when their survival is threatened; that some scarcity in the necessities of life exists; that in men benevolence is limited in its range and weaker than self-love; and that competition for sexual favors is a source of such jealousy and insecurity that it can abruptly turn fierce and vicious. It is not surprising then to find in different societies many similar prohibitions and requirements, and these similarities among the prohibitions and requirements of different societies have seemed to some to be the reflection of a true morality, a system of supremely rational principles of which all civilized people are, however dimly, aware and which, through their awareness, guides their conduct or would guide it if other influences and considerations did not interfere.

Belief in such a morality, however, is not necessary for understanding why different societies have similar prohibitions and requirements. Other explanations, which make no reference to a true morality, are available. Thus, different societies have similar prohibitions and requirements because their customary moralities have the same social function and because the above-listed conditions of human life are true of human beings the world over. Still, the tempta-

3. Plato, *Protagoras*, C.C.W. Taylor, trans. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 322a-d.
4. David Hume *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed., L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (eds.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) bk. 3, pt. 2; *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and the Principles of Morals*, 3d ed., L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (eds.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), sec. 3 of the second *Inquiry*. Recent works that develop this idea include P. F. Strawson, "Social Morality and Individual Ideal," *Philosophy*, 36 (1961): 1-17; G. J. Warnock, *The Object of Morality* (London: Methuen, 1971); and J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

tion remains to regard these similar prohibitions and requirements as prefiguring moral principles that are valid for all rational souls, and yielding to this temptation, many philosophers have sought to uncover these principles and to reconstruct the system they constitute. As a result, these philosophers have tended to discount morality's social function as either an uninteresting fact about customary moralities or a by-product of the universal acceptance among human beings of that system of principles whose content and logic these philosophers have made it their project to explicate. They have, in other words, been led to consider questions of content and logic in abstraction from social function. And a useful antidote to the allure of this rationalist project is to consider social function in abstraction from questions of content and logic.

A good way to proceed is to focus on personal relations, relations between friends and among the members of a family. On this way of proceeding, we should first consider the natural dynamics of such relations as determined by the mutual love and affection that bind friends or the members of a family together, and we should then consider how their mutually accepting certain moral prohibitions and requirements on their conduct toward one another, that is, their having a shared understanding of what they owe each other in the way of forbearances and positive services, affects these dynamics. The idea of this second step is to bring out both how a morality can serve to reinforce the bonds of friendship and family that mutual love and affection establish and how it can help to restore harmony to these personal relations when they have been strained or ruptured. This idea, once developed, can then be readily extended to social relations more distant than those of friendship and family, social relations that arise from joint membership in a society. It can thus be made to yield an account of how a morality serves to foster and maintain social stability generally. With this way of proceeding in mind then, let us turn to the natural dynamics of personal relations.

We can spare ourselves the diversion of imagining a state of nature, arcadian or harsh, whose human inhabitants live either without the need of an organized society or without the benefit of one. It will suffice to describe abstractly how some natural feelings and attitudes work to bring and keep people together while others drive and keep them apart. I have already mentioned affection and love as representative of natural feelings and attitudes of the first sort. To these we should add feelings of dependency - those of young children toward their parents of course, but also those of spouses, of intimate friends, and of aging parents toward their adult children. And we should add as well the complementary feelings of protectiveness - those of parents toward their children, and also those of spouses, of intimate friends, and of adults toward their aging parents. Where these natural feelings and attitudes are strong and mutual or complementary, friends and family are close-knit.

At the same time, underlying tensions may exist. A man may be insecure in his relations with a friend, say, or harbor unconsciously hostile attitudes towards him. This insecurity or hostility may be traced to past differences between them, or it may have only superficially to do with his friend, its roots going back to disappointments and injuries he suffered long before they first met. Be this as it may, these underlying tensions represent structural weaknesses, so to speak, in their relations. Hence, irritation and anger that a friend's thoughtlessness or selfishness provokes are more likely to cause a rift in the relations, and the suspicion and enmity that may then set in will impede renewal of good relations. These are natural feelings and attitudes of the sort that drive and keep people apart. Of course, if a friendship is structurally sound, then anger and irritation that can quickly erupt between friends will just as quickly die down. No suspicion of the other's motives or lack of attachment will take hold. No enmity, with its characteristic desire to strike back, will occur. Only a serious betrayal of friendship would severely strain or rupture such relations. Few of our friendships, though, ever achieve this ideal.

At the heart of good relations is trust. Trust cements a friendship, so we say, and correspondingly its erosion or destruction, whether due to an accumulation of harms and hurt feelings or a single act of betrayal, commonly causes friendships to falter and break up. These points apply readily to the natural dynamics of personal relations. For trust can develop directly from mutual affection and love. Thus, when mutual affection brings two people together, when mutual love unites them, each cares about the other's welfare and has concern for his happiness, and each realizes that his own welfare and happiness likewise matter to the other. Trust then develops when this realization gives one confidence in the other, confidence that he will act with one's interests at heart. And this trust is shown in one's engaging with him in cooperative activities, relying on him for help and support in one's own activities, and sharing with him something of oneself: one's plans, hopes, concerns, fears, and the like. Confident that he will not act against or in disregard of one's interests, one does not take precautions or remain watchful or alert in one's relations with him as one would when dealing with someone whom one took to be potentially or actually opposed or indifferent to one's interests. Moreover, one's trust in him need not be total like a child's trust in its parents, and it need not be blind like the trust of innocent love. Trust can be limited by recognition of the normal boundaries that separate adult lives, and it can be made wise by experience so that one comes not to expect too much of friends and loved ones, to allow for their foibles and personal imperatives. A reasonable trust, which develops out of mutual affection and love, is therefore possible. Its elements are the realization that the person one trusts cares and

has concern for one and a resulting confidence that he will not act against or in disregard of one's interests.

What damages such trust, then, are acts that harm or put one in danger. Needless to say, one's trust in a friend would remain intact so long as one was unaware of his having harmed or endangered one. But the recognition that he has should lessen one's confidence in him. It should give one reason to question how much he cares and has concern for one. In the worst case, his act will exhibit false friendship and thus undermine completely one's trust. However, it may only indicate a susceptibility to thoughtlessness or selfishness or an inability to resist temptation or persevere in hazardous circumstances. In any of these latter cases the damage to one's trust will be limited, though of course repeated acts of this kind or retaliatory measures of one's own would worsen the damage.

At the same time, repair is possible. Realizing what he has done - that he has harmed one or upset one through endangerment - he may express sorrow and regret. Perhaps it was unintentional or necessary under the circumstances, in which case he might try to put one's mind at ease through explanation and reassurance and might also offer compensation for any harm. But even if it were indefensible, he could still try to set things right. He could renounce the satisfaction he got from the action and offer to make it up to one in kind. And seeing the depth of his feeling and the sincerity of his desire to preserve the friendship, one may in turn show oneself willing to forget the harm or distress one suffered and not to hold it against him. In these ways hard feelings can be assuaged, suspicions removed, and trust restored. In these ways, ruptured relations can be made once again whole.

This trust, whose development, loss, and restoration I have been tracing, is to be understood as a wholly natural attitude, one that the best of friends, for instance, have toward each other. That is, one can understand it without assuming anything about either friend's having accepted moral prohibitions and requirements on his conduct. And indeed, my intention is that it be so understood. The basis for this understanding should be clear enough. The care and concern that each friend has for his friend's welfare and happiness, being aspects of his affection and love, are direct. They are unmediated by his having accepted any such moral requirements as the requirement to look out for the welfare of his friends. Consequently, since trust in this case arises from a realization that one's friend has such care and concern for one's welfare and happiness, it arises without regard to his having accepted any moral prohibitions and requirements on his conduct.

The model for such trust, as you might expect, is the earliest form of trust in a human life: the infant's trust in its mother. Trust in this case develops in response to the mother's love. It arises from the infant's recognizing in its

mother's attention to its wants and needs, in the actions she takes to satisfy them, and in her accompanying facial and vocal expressions, a constant, benevolent desire for its happiness. The confidence in her that the infant thereby acquires amounts then to trust that obviously develops without the infant's having regard to its mother's acceptance of moral requirements. After all, even your brightest infant does not yet comprehend the moral duties of parents that custody of their children entails. In other words, we plainly understand an infant's trust in its mother as a wholly natural attitude in the sense previously specified.

This trust, it is important to note, is a matter of the infant's having confidence in its mother in view of her devotion to its happiness. It is not or not merely a matter of its having such confidence in view of her reliability as a provider of food, comfort, and warmth. That she regularly provides for her infant's wants and needs may explain its great attachment to and rudimentary love for her, but it cannot explain its trust. For trust, unlike attachment and love, necessarily looks to the will.[5] A good will is what qualifies a person as trustworthy. Mere regularity in her behavior that is due entirely to competence and a steady interest in what she does qualifies her as dependable or reliable and nothing more. Thus the infant's trust in its mother is explained by its recognizing her good will as manifested in the love and care she bestows. And analogously for other forms of natural trust: one's recognizing another's good will, as it is manifested in her affection and concern for one, explains such trust.

Let us now introduce moral prohibitions and requirements into the circumstances of personal relations. Specifically, let us add to our account of friendship and family that friends and the members of families - infants, toddlers, and others too young or senile to have or still have a conscience excepted - understand and accept these prohibitions and requirements as binding on their conduct toward one another. Friends, we are now supposing, have a conscience about how they treat each other as well as a natural inclination to treat each other well, and each, so we are further supposing, believes about the

5. I am here adapting Rousseau's important observation that the child's love for its parents develops from its recognizing in the benefits it receives from them their love and affection for it. See J. J. Rousseau, *Émile, or On Education*, Allan Bloom, trans. (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 213; see also John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press,1971), pp. 463-464 and 490-496. To fit the observation to my account, I suggest that the child becomes attached to and develops a rudimentary love for its mother before it recognizes itself as the intended beneficiary of its mother's attention and care and that Rousseau's observation applies to a later developmental stage at which the child's trust in its mother arises. In other words, I suggest that Rousseau's observation concerns not the onset of love but rather the development of a maturer love that includes trust. For extensive discussion of factors determining the child's attachment to its mother, see John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), vol. 1.

other, sees in his conduct, that he too possesses a conscience. In other words, their acceptance of moral prohibitions and requirements on their conduct toward each other is mutual. And similarly for the members of families.

This mutual acceptance by friends and family members of moral prohibitions and requirements on their conduct furthers the ends of friendship and family unity. The point is not hard to see. Take, for example, a friendship. While friends are inclined to treat each other well, they are also only human. Each therefore is subject to temptations, pressures, and impulsive and selfish desires that, if yielded to, would lead him into action that would harm or endanger his friends. That is, they invite or prompt thoughtless and selfish actions, which, as we noted before, can damage or rupture good relations. Of course, his affections and concern for his friend counter to some degree these temptations, pressures, and desires, but rarely to a degree that would remove them as threats to the friendship. The threats they represent, however, are significantly reduced by his acceptance of moral prohibitions and requirements as binding on his conduct. For such acceptance, which in an individual's psychology is shown by the possession of a conscience, increases his ability to check the motivational force of these temptations, pressures, and desires. His conscience puts him on guard against the unwanted consequences they lead to, and it strengthens his will to resist them. It monitors his thoughts and intentions, and it acts as a break against inconstancy, pliancy, and self-indulgence. In these ways, acceptance of moral prohibitions and requirements, when mutual, reinforces the bonds of friendship, and it likewise reinforces the bonds of the family unit.

Again, trust is a key element in these, now moralized, relations. But the trust that cements these relations is not a wholly natural trust and, correspondingly, acts that cause or risk harm to a friend or relative are not the only kind of act that can damage or destroy it. Friendships and families, as we are now conceiving of them, are governed by moral prohibitions and requirements and, consequently, trust between friends and among the members of a family is sustained not only by their mutual affection and love but also by their mutual acceptance of these prohibitions and requirements. That is, the trust one has in a friend, say, is grounded both in a belief that one's friend cares and has concern for one's welfare and happiness and in a belief that he is sensitive to moral prohibitions and requirements and has a conscience about fulfilling the duties they define. To be sure, such trust draws much more of its strength from a friend's affection and concern than from his conscientiousness. But it would be a mistake to exclude the latter altogether from being a source of trust. In a civilized society, the good will that qualifies a friend as trustworthy consists partly in his benevolence towards one and partly in his having a conscience about how he treats one.

This distinction between being benevolent and having a conscience is by no means nominal. Indeed, we have already implicitly acknowledged its reality in noting how conscience importantly supports the benevolent attitudes and feelings that friends and the members of families have toward one another. But we can establish the distinction's reality more clearly by pointing out a realm of action that conscience, independently of benevolence and sometimes in opposition to its influence, governs.

Broadly speaking, conscience moves its possessor to conform his conduct to moral prohibitions and requirements. Thus it directs him to give to others what he owes them. Typically what one owes another would benefit him, whereas withholding it from him would harm or endanger him. Typically then, conscience and benevolence agree in the actions they prompt. Sometimes, however, what one owes another would not benefit him and could even harm or endanger him. For instance, one might owe another the truth on some matter in circumstances in which he would be better off not knowing it. In this instance, conscience and benevolence oppose each other. Conscience would direct one to tell him the truth while benevolence, unrestrained by conscience, would move one to withhold it from him and to lie, if this were necessary, to keep him ignorant of it. The duty to tell the truth is therefore one example of a moral requirement that conscience at times enforces when benevolence is silent and even at times enforces against benevolence's wishes. Additional examples are the duty to respect the property of others, the duty to respect their privacy, and the duty to forbear making false promises. The occasional conflicts between these duties and the urgings of benevolence make clear that conscience and benevolence are distinct sources of motivation.

Correspondingly, then, trust that cements friendships and families, conceived of as moral relations, can be damaged or destroyed in two distinct ways. Since such trust develops from mutual acceptance of moral prohibitions and requirements as well as from mutual affection and love, it can be damaged or destroyed by acts that violate those prohibitions and requirements as well as by acts that harm or endanger a friend or relative. In particular, it can be damaged by acts of the former kind that are not also acts of the latter kind. A mother, anxious about her daughter's social life, illicitly reads her daughter's diary. It may contain only the most tame and reassuring descriptions of a normal teen-age girl's life, nothing the girl wouldn't openly tell her mother. Nevertheless, if the girl discovered this invasion of her privacy, trust between mother and daughter would be damaged. The invasion would undermine the girl's confidence in her mother as a respecter of her privacy. Similarly your trust in a roommate could easily be damaged if you discovered that while you were at work or school and without your consent, he took your new car for afternoon drives. "No harm done," he might say, "I always refill the tank." And

he could be right: no harm was ever done or risked. Still, his actions would likely undermine your confidence in him as a respecter of your personal property. In this way the failure to observe a duty that one has to a friend or relative, even when unattended by any harm or risk of harm to him, can strain and perhaps even rupture one's relations with him.

At the same time, if one sees that one has in this way damaged relations with a friend, one can attempt to repair the damage. One can express sorrow and regret, offer explanations, ask forgiveness, and make apologies and further amends. By these actions one disowns, as it were, one's transgression, seeks to regain the trust one lost, and signals a desire to renew good relations. Indeed, having invaded a friend's privacy or property or violated some other duty to him, one owes him an explanation, apologies, and perhaps additional reparations. One's reparative acts therefore fall within the province of the moral prohibitions and requirements that govern one's relations with him, and with friends and family generally. In other words, these prohibitions and requirements not only define the duties of forbearance and positive service performance of which helps to maintain trust between friends and the members of a family but also define a duty of reparations, which one incurs upon violating one of these duties and through the discharge of which one seeks to restore the trust one breached by that violation. Compliance with moral prohibitions and requirements thus serves both to maintain harmonious relations with friends and family and to guide passage back to harmony when those relations have been damaged.

Obviously, though, fulfilling a duty of reparations one has incurred will not automatically restore harmony to the relations one has damaged. Harmony is restored when mutual trust and goodwill are reestablished, and their reestablishment is not automatically or even assuredly accompanied by the performance of this duty. For one thing, the friend to whom one had the duty one violated may not, despite one's expressing regret, asking forgiveness, and offering apologies and other reparations, be willing or ready to trust one again or to let the resentment he has toward one subside. Consequently, he may not accept one's apologies or grant forgiveness. Or though he outwardly accepts them and grants it, he may not truly forgive. His distrust and resentment continue, perhaps unconsciously. For another, one's reparative acts may themselves be insincere. One may perform the duty of reparations one has incurred but have no sense of guilt or bad conscience about the act for which one is offering reparations. One may make apologies and further amends but not regret or repent it. If evident, one's insincerity will impede one's regaining the trust one lost. Within friendships and families especially, perfunctory apologies and amends-making only harden ill-feeling. And even if one successfully masks one's insincerity, one's own, presumably complicated, feelings

about one's actions and one's friend are likely to interfere with the renewal of harmonious relations. Thus, on either side of the friendship, suspicions and bad feeling or self-doubt and anxiety can impede the reestablishment of mutual trust and goodwill that offering and accepting reparations normally accomplishes.

The foregoing, in effect, warns against confusing reparative acts so called because they fulfill the duty of reparations with reparative acts so called because they succeed in restoring harmony to damaged personal relations. To avoid this confusion let us call the former formally reparative and the latter effectively reparative. Formally reparative acts, as we've seen, are not necessarily effectively reparative. Yet the connection between them should be clear. A violation of a moral prohibition or requirement is liable to arouse in its victims resentment at being denied what was owed them and to bring into doubt the strength of the violator's conscience. It tends to create in the victims ill-will toward the violator and to lessen their confidence in his having accepted moral prohibitions and requirements on his conduct toward them. It tends, that is, to undermine their goodwill toward and trust in him. Now, if his action is defensible, then he normally needs only to express regret and to offer an explanation and perhaps also an apology to appease any ill-will or resentment he may have aroused and to reassure the victims that he has a conscience about how he treats them. If, on the other hand, his action is indefensible, then to achieve the same results he normally needs to offer at least an apology and often additional reparations besides. Thus, in either case, his formally reparative acts serve to restore the victim's goodwill toward and trust in him or to forestall their losing that goodwill and trust, a loss that would normally occur if no such acts were performed. And if he is sincere in performing them and if their recipients are understanding and forgiving, then these acts should be effectively reparative as well.

Of course, the mutual love and affection and the complementary feelings of dependency and protectiveness that unite friends or the members of a family also motivate them to mend their differences and renew good relations when those relations have been strained or ruptured. The pain of disaffection and the desire for union are themselves strong motives to reconciliation. A sense of guilt and a stricken conscience are, then, not the only springs of reparative action. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that within friendships and families the workings of conscience normally have a secondary role in bringing about such action. Their role is nonetheless important. For conscience not only guides one to perform those actions that, because formally reparative, conventionally facilitate reconciliation but also provides motivation to attempt reconciliation. And this additional motivation is sometimes needed; for despite the strong motivation that love, affection, and feelings of

dependency or protectiveness provide, anxiety over rekindled anger, fear of rejection, and especially pride can stand in the way of one's making the attempt. Conscience, in other words, not only counsels but prods. It tells one about the moral path one should take back to good relations and helps, when help is needed, to start one down that path.

To summarize, then, while mutual love and affection and complementary feelings of dependency and protectiveness naturally bind friends and the members of a family together, their having mutually accepted moral prohibitions and requirements on their conduct toward each other reinforces these natural bonds. In particular, while mutual love and affection and complementary feelings of dependency and protectiveness form the natural basis for the trust that cements friendships and families, mutual acceptance of moral prohibitions and requirements broadens and makes firmer that basis. It contributes both to the maintenance of that trust and to its restoration when it has been damaged. Relations between friends and among the members of a family, in being governed by moral prohibitions and requirements, are thus made more stable. What I earlier called morality's social function is clearly exemplified in these personal relations.

It is exemplified as well in more socially distant relations, specifically those that arise from joint membership in a community. For social cohesion in a community depends on its members' sharing an understanding of what each owes the others, both individually and collectively, in the way of forbearances and positive services. That is, in a community, the prevalence and constancy of harmonious social relations depend on its members' mutually accepting moral prohibitions and requirements on their conduct toward each other. To be sure, most every member will have some affection and fellow feeling for and towards the others, but in the absence of widespread acceptance of moral prohibitions and requirements throughout the membership, such affection and fellow feeling would be either too limited or too weak to hold the community together. Alone they would not effectively counter the narrow interests, including especially self-interest, and the emotions and impulses that motivate actions harmful to others. The frequency of such actions would breed fear and distrust among the members, making their relations acrimonious and hostile. To check the spread of acrimony and hostility throughout the community, to create conditions for social harmony, most every member then must accept moral prohibitions and requirements as binding on his conduct toward the others. That is, he must develop a conscience, which both works to restrain him from yielding to those narrow interests, emotions, and impulses that, if acted on, would harm others and moves him to reparative action when he has violated one of its strictures and consequently damaged or risked damaging harmonious relations he has with others. In other words, widespread ac-

ceptance of moral prohibitions and requirements among the members of a community is necessary for peaceful, friendly relations to prevail among them.

Here too trust is a key element. Widespread acceptance of moral prohibitions and requirements makes possible a climate of trust in which fellow feeling and a general affection for others can survive and grow. It forms the basis for trust among acquaintances and strangers, and this basis is then broadened and made firmer by the spirit of fellowship that a community in which such trust is established fosters and that normally informs relations among its members. Thus trust that stabilizes these social relations is similar to trust that cements friendship and families. In either case it is based on both natural and moral attitudes and dispositions. At the same time, the two differ in that trust among the members of a community is normally established through mutual acceptance of moral prohibitions and requirements and strengthened by mutual goodwill and fellow feeling, whereas trust between friends and among the members of a family is normally established through mutual love and affection and strengthened by mutual acceptance of moral prohibitions and requirements. Consequently, while the account of how the workings of conscience contribute to the maintenance of trust among the members of a community and to its restoration when that trust is damaged will be similar in general respects to our earlier account of how the workings of conscience contribute to the maintenance and restoration of trust between friends and among the members of a family, the two accounts will differ importantly in specifics. Put summarily, conscience normally has a much more important role in bringing stability to the social relations to which joint membership in a community gives rise than it does in bringing stability to personal relations.

This summary difference is reflected, for instance, in the much greater rigidity that moral prohibitions and requirements have in their application to one's dealings with strangers and acquaintances. After all, it would be a sadly wooden family whose members dealt with each other as punctiliously as they dealt with strangers and acquaintances, and similarly punctilious dealings between friends would be a sure sign that their friendship was withering. Friends and family, as a rule, are more understanding and accepting of certain acts of noncompliance with moral prohibitions and requirements, certain failures to fulfill duties one owes them, than are strangers and acquaintances of parallel acts of noncompliance, parallel failures to fulfill duties one owes them. They are more understanding because the greater reserves of good feeling on which their trust in one is staked makes one's complying strictly with moral prohibitions and requirements less important in a wider range of cases to maintaining that trust, and they are more accepting because the greater concern they have for one's welfare implies a greater concern that their rights not stand as

ceremonial obstructions to one's efforts at avoiding harm or making gains. Consequently, in one's dealings with friends and family one has greater latitude to act in disregard of a moral prohibition or requirement than one has in one's dealings with strangers and acquaintances. In many cases, reasons that one could not expect strangers or acquaintances to accept as excusing one's having disregarded duties owed them one can expect friends and family to accept.

A good source of examples is the duty to respect another's property. Thus the roommate who took your car for afternoon drives without your consent, though a friend, did not have a good enough reason to excuse his failure to respect your property. But had he taken your car to fetch a sister of his who was stranded in a strange part of town, you would, I presume, have accepted this reason as excusing his action. Indeed, if the two of you were close enough friends, he would no doubt have assumed more or less automatically that you would understand. By contrast, you would have to be a person of singular magnanimity to be equally understanding when a mere acquaintance - the super of the large apartment complex in which you live, say, or a new roommate whom you only just met the day before - takes your car without your consent for the purpose of fetching his stranded sister. He might leave you a note explaining the disappearance of your car, but he could not reasonably expect you to accept this explanation as excusing his action. What he appears not to appreciate is the greater rigidity that moral prohibitions and requirements have in their application to a person's dealings with strangers and acquaintances, a greater rigidity that reflects the greater dependency of trust between strangers or acquaintances on mutual acceptance of moral prohibitions and requirements.

That the rigidity of moral prohibitions and requirements varies in this way is then an explicable fact on an approach to ethics that focuses on morality's social function. By contrast, on rationalist approaches that focus on morality's content and logic in abstraction from its social function and that take morality to be a system of rules whose validity is universal and ascertainable by reason, it is a fugitive fact. The hallmark of such rationalism is the thesis that the rules of morality are the supreme rules of practical reason: when these rules apply to one's situation, they yield prescriptions that reason requires one to follow above all others.[6] Yet this conception of morality as an abstract system of supremely rational rules implies, if anything, that the rigidity of moral prohibitions and requirements is invariant across social contexts. For to allow that the rigidity varies according to social context is to allow that in social contexts of less than maximum rigidity certain extramoral considerations,

6. See, e.g., Gewirth, passim and Darwall, pp. 201-239.